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EDITOR: JOHN GARRETT · 17 ROUTE DE MALAGNOU · GENEVA · SWITZERLAND
TEL. 36 71 30 · CABLES OIKOUMENE
U.S. ENQUIRIES: WCC, 475, RIVERSIDE DRIVE, NEW YORK 27: TEL. RIVERSIDE 9-4887

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Nigerian Churches Prepare for Political Independence

(Idi-Aba, Nigeria) - Nigerian church leaders emphasised the responsibility of churches in their country, with the coming of national independence on October 1, at a meeting of the Christian Council of Nigeria, May 11 - 20.

A keynote address by Anglican Bishop S.O. Odutola of Ondo-Benin pointed out that "as we have had to give a lead in the past in certain respects and we have done so successfully, so the country will expect us to continue". The bishop predicted that "the only difference will be that the missions will be less in evidence and the Church more in evidence after independence, and the Church can count on the promise God gave once when leadership passed from one hand to another: 'As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee nor forsake thee, only be strong and of a good courage'".

According to Bishop Odutola, who is retiring president of the Christian Council, "the comparative ease and calmness the Church has been enjoying may be due to the Pax Britannica imposed on Nigeria". He asked: "What will happen or may not happen when the imperial force behind the Pax Britannica is removed?"

He called on the Council to "issue a clarion call to all our members to go out like Abraham from their present environment of bribery, corruption, and belief that politics is a dirty game, to the land where God is the first, our fellowmen second, and ourselves last".

Later the Council decided to launch a study of "The Christian Responsibility in an Independent Nigeria". A team of two leaders, a Nigerian director and an expert from abroad, will make a study of Christian responsibility in all three regions of Nigeria, leading up to a national study conference in May or June, 1961. The study will be made as part of the World Council of Churches' international inquiry on the Common Christian Responsibility Toward Areas of Rapid Social Change and with financial help from the Church of the Brethren in the USA.

The Rev. Paul Abrecht and the Rev. Daisuke Kitagawa of the WCC's Department on Church and Society attended the Christian Council's meeting to help plan the study alongside the representatives of the Nigerian churches.

The Nigerian study will investigate three needs: provision of Christian leaders in national life; definition of national political and economic goals in Christian terms; and the Christian role in overcoming social and group tensions.

Immediate action to be taken by the Christian Council before national independence is declared on October 1 includes preparation of a message on the Christian attitude to the state and of a fifteen-page booklet on the role of the churches and missions in making Nigeria what it is today. Missionaries and church leaders from abroad have been invited by the regional governments to participate in the October 1 celebrations as a salute to the role of missions in the evolution of Nigeria.

Bible studies led by Archdeacon I.O.S. Okunsanya of Ondo-Benin stressed the importance of church unity in the new period ahead. "We should talk of the Church, one body", he told the Council. "There was a time when all thinking was done for us by whites. Now we must be one body in Nigeria. We must think of the Church, of which the church in Nigeria is a part."

In other action the Christian Council:

CALLED FOR co-operation in a scheme of the Western Region government to train youth in agriculture as a vocation. The churches plan to participate in the scheme by appointing chaplains for "evangelism and pastoral oversight". Already one-year courses designed to keep youth on the land are being run in training institutions with experienced Israeli advisers;

AUTHORISED EXPANSION of its work in literature distribution and the use of audiovisual media;

SOUGHT CONTACT with Christian groups in Nigeria outside its own membership where these acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour;

REQUESTED the government to study the legal situation in Nigeria resulting from widespread confusion over marriages of custom not registered with the state. The coming of Islam and the break-up of tribal loyalties contribute to the problem, which is complicated by the exploitation of unattached children;

EMBARKED on a training programme to help men and women in the Christian understanding of the Biblical and sociological issues of the relations between men and women in a rapidly changing society. The work will be conducted in collaboration with the WCC's Department on the Co-operation of Men and Women. Miss Cox van Heemstra, WCC leader of women's teams in Africa, attended the NCC's meeting;

GREETED the Christian Council in Japan, expressed sympathy with Japan's Christians in the death of Toyohiko Kagawa and sent a gift of £ 40 to help relief work among destitute and disaster-stricken Japanese youth;

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RESOLVED to co-operate fully in an international study of the theology of mission being conducted by the International Missionary Council;

SPOKE OUT AGAINST the racial policies of the South African government and "equally" against "the violence that would use assassination as a political weapon";

SENT OFFERINGS for the work of the churches in World Refugee Year and the support of "treason trial defendants" and their relatives in South Africa.

The meetings were attended by about 120 participants from all parts of Nigeria and abroad.
EPS, Geneva

Divided Netherlands Churches to Use Same Building

(Eindhoven) - Congregations of the Netherlands Reformed (Hervormde) and Gereformeerde churches will use one church building for worship in Eindhoven, the rapidly developing town around the Philips electrical plants in the south of the country.

The foundation stone of the church was laid on May 14. Funds are being provided by the national Hervormde church, the larger of the two. The Gereformeerde Church, a more conservative Calvinist body, broke away from the Hervormde church in the 19th century.

At the ceremony, spokesmen from both groups praised the agreement reached. The Hervormde pastor, W. van Gelder, said the church would not be "Hervormde" but a house of worship and prayer for all who look to one God and one Mediator for salvation. Gereformeerde Pastor A. Vellema said that although the two churches were not united, it was "a wonderful thing to come together in the same church as God's people".

Plans in hand for a Gereformeerde church in another part of the town allow for congregations of both churches to use the building in the same way.

EPS, Geneva

Moscow Church Excommunicates Professed Atheists

(Moscow) - The Patriarch and Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church have publicly excommunicated an apostate theological professor and other members who engaged in anti-religious propaganda.

According to the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" the decision was taken at a meeting of the Holy Synod in December. A synod decree pronounces Alexander Ossipov, "former protopriest and professor of the Leningrad Theological Academy" to be "expelled from holy orders and deprived of all churchly intercourse".

The same decree expels "former protopriest Paul Darmansky" and "other servants of the Church" for having "publicly blasphemed the name of God".

The former clergymen and a number of apostate laymen excommunicated for the same reason have engaged in recent months in writing articles against the Russian Orthodox Church in the daily press and in atheist publications.

In announcing the excommunications the Synod quotes the First Epistle of John, 2.19: "They went out from us but they were not of us".

Japanese Christians Oppose Eisenhower Visit to Shinto Shrine

(Tokyo) - Japan's National Christian Council has protested against plans for President Eisenhower to go to the Shinto Meiji shrine in Tokyo when he makes a state visit to Japan next month.

A three-man delegation from the Council told officials of the American Embassy that the President's schedule included no visits to other religious shrines and amounted to a bow toward the Shinto faith, which General Douglas McArthur severed from government support in 1954.

The NCC delegation also claimed that the visit violated the Japanese Constitution, which claims equal rights for all religions, and that if the call at the shrine was "sightseeing" the president should also see the sights of other religions in Japan.

(The Meiji shrine is a place of devotion to the Emperor Meiji, grandfather of Emperor Hirohito, and a centre of the nationalist Shinto cult.)

Cancellation of the president's visit to the shrine on June 20 was also urged by the Japanese NCC in messages to the White House, the National Council of Churches in the USA, the Japanese Foreign and Education ministries and leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in Japan. EPS, Geneva

US Churches Send Fellowship Assurance to South Africa

(New York) - A letter of "Christian fellowship" has been sent by the US Conference for the World Council of Churches to the Council's eight member churches in the Union of South Africa.

"You and we face similar problems of tension in different national contexts", says the communication, which was made public in New York last week.

"Although we are making definite progress toward the solution of our problems, as Christians in the United States, we write with no pride of accomplishment", the letter continues. "There is much to be done here to accomplish the will of God in Christ and to develop a social order consonant with the mind of Christ, who lived and died for all men."

The US Conference is composed of the thirty member churches of the WCC in the USA.

The letter, citing the resolutions of the World Council's 1954 Evanston Assembly against racial segregation and discrimination, says that "in these testing times you and we need the gifts of wisdom and of courage to witness to the truth of the Gospel". EPS, Geneva

Indonesia's Church Council Ten Years Old

(Djakarta) - The tenth anniversary of the Council of Churches in Indonesia was marked throughout the country by special services on Sunday, May 22, "Ecumenical Day".

"Jesus Christ, the Light of the World", theme of the WCC's Third Assembly scheduled for New Delhi, India, at the end of 1961, was used in sermons.

A consultation of Indonesian churches to be held in early July in Djakarta will select delegates and prepare Indonesia's study contribution for the WCC's New Delhi meeting. EPS, Geneva

Indonesian Church Takes Stand on Marriage, Divorce

(Djakarta) - The Protestant Church of the Island of Timor has defined its attitude to marriage and divorce.

The church declares that it is ready to bless marriages concluded according to ancient "adat" (customary) law on the same basis as government-registered unions when the parties ask for this blessing in the church.

The Timor Church asks for legislation now in force elsewhere in Indonesia to be recognised in Timor, so that "adat" and state-registered marriages may be brought into line with each other.

Other declarations of the church affirm that it "does not recognise dissolution of marriage except by death" and cannot bless second marriages after divorce except after investigation of adultery and similar causes.

The right of Christians to receive Holy Communion even after marrying non-Christians is upheld.

EPS, Geneva

New Caledonian Church Becomes Autonomous

(Noumea, New Caledonia) - The Evangelical Church of New Caledonia in the South Pacific has been given autonomy by the Paris Mission.

The Gospel was first preached in New Caledonia 119 years ago.

The church was given its new status at a service conducted in the presence of the civil authorities on April 24. A "Declaration of Autonomy" turns over mission property to the church and places missionaries under church direction. The church will now be governed by a synod and council without missionary intervention.

The reorganisation follows a decision of the Paris Mission made in 1957. The Evangelical Church has 15,000 members out of a total New Caledonian population of 70,000.

EPS, Geneva

Americans Back from Istanbul Pilgrimage

(New York) - Archbishop Iakovos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America has returned home after leading 535 pilgrims on a visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and to Greece.

The archbishop reported that in spite of martial law in Turkey the group had been welcomed by the government and the city authorities in Istanbul and given facilities to see the holy places of the Orthodox faith.

The "Holy Light", a symbolic torch lit by the Ecumenical Patriarch at the Easter liturgy in Constantinople, has been kept alight and brought back by the pilgrims to kindle flames in all 378 Greek Orthodox churches in the Americas.

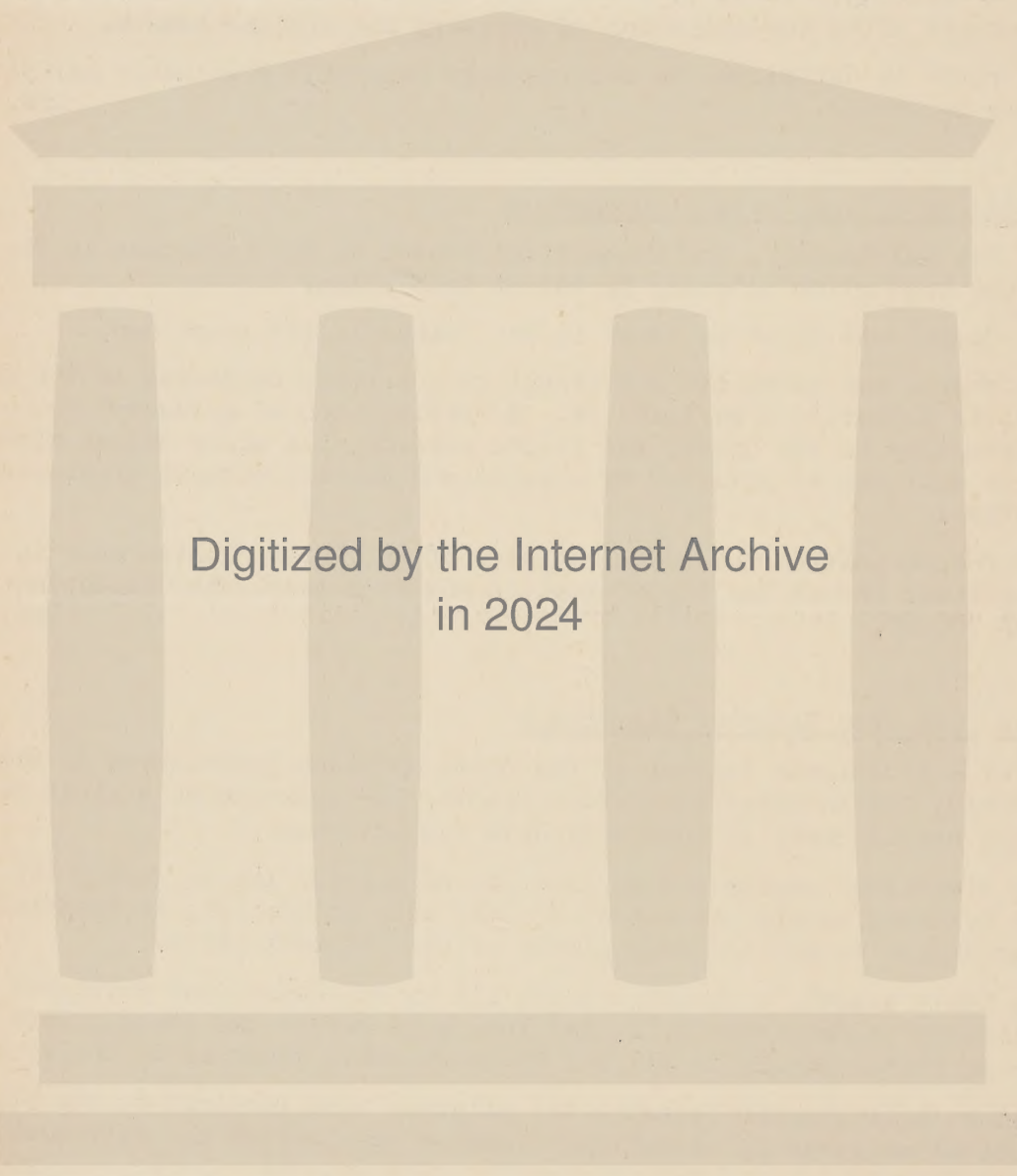
During their stay in Istanbul the pilgrims were received by the Ecumenical Patriarch, Athenagoras I. Archbishop Iakovos has invited the Patriarch to visit the United States.

EPS, Geneva

Churches Mark 50th Anniversary of Edinburgh 1910

(New York) - Jubilee services of thanksgiving for the First World Missionary Conference, held in Edinburgh in 1910, began with an act of worship in New York on May 25.

The service was sponsored by the National Council of Churches in the USA in co-operation with the International Missionary Council, the World Council of Churches, the World Council of Christian Education and Sunday School Association and the Protestant Council of the City of New York.



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Bishop Lesslie Newbigin, general secretary of the IMC, was the preacher.

Other commemorations will be held in London and Edinburgh later in the year.

Bishop Newbigin will again preach at Westminster Abbey on June 21 at a service planned by the Conference of British Missionary Societies and the British Council of Churches. Places are being reserved for "veterans" who were present at the Edinburgh 1910 meeting.

In Edinburgh itself a widely televised service will be held in St. Giles' Cathedral on the afternoon of Sunday August 14. Church leaders from many parts of the world who will be attending summer meetings of the World Council of Churches at St. Andrews, Scotland, will take part.

EPS, Geneva

In Brief

The annual assembly of the Congregational Union of England and Wales has decided to resume talks with the Presbyterian Church of England. Professor Eric Fenn, the Presbyterian moderator, told the Congregational Assembly he believed the deadlock on Christian unity in Britain must be broken and that Presbyterians and Congregationalists should give a lead.

* *

A new home for aged Russian refugees has been opened at Healesville, Victoria, Australia, by the Resettlement Department of the Australian Council for the World Council of Churches. The project will house 10 refugees from China and has been made possible by co-operation with the local Russian Welfare Society, the Australian Government and the United Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees.

* *

The Indian Government is willing to sell building sites for Protestant churches in housing areas adjacent to the country's new industrial developments. A delegation from the National Christian Council was told by Sardar Swaran Singh, the Minister for Mines, Steel and Power, that the needs of all religious groups for such land would be met. The rate of growth of the new industrial populations is compelling Protestants to unite in programmes for building and common worship.

* *

An 11-year old Latvian boy, Andrejs Suritis, was the millionth person to be resettled overseas by the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM). The arrival of Andrejs, a Lutheran, in New York was sponsored by America's Lutheran Immigration Service and the Lutheran World Federation.

* *

The Dutch Protestant Film Centre in Hilversum, which organises country-wide courses in film use and appreciation reports a sharp increase in the number of courses and film showings in 1959. Showings rose from 2,240 in 1958 to 2,850 in 1959 and the centre reported growing interest in Protestant-sponsored films in community organisations and Roman Catholic groups.

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An agricultural centre set up two years ago by the Dayak Evangelical Church in South Borneo reports an increase in enrolment from six to 38 students for its second year of operation. Staffed by a Swiss farmer and two Dayak Christians, the centre receives financial aid from Switzerland and Germany, but is self-sufficient for maintenance of resident students.

* *

His Holiness Vasken I, Supreme Patriarch Catholicos of All Armenians, was scheduled to begin a visit to the United States on May 20. The Catholicos, whose residence is in Etchmiadzin, Soviet Armenia, is the spiritual leader of 4,000,000 Armenians throughout the world. It is the first time a supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church has visited America.

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The Rev. Dr. Herman Lee Turner of Atlanta, Georgia, has been elected Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. Dr. Turner, who has been prominent in action favouring desegregation in Atlanta, defeated the Rev. Edler G. Hawkins, Negro minister of a church in the Bronx, New York, by 471 votes to 469.

EPS, Geneva

